

Beth Wyatt
Supervising Park Ranger, Mt. Valley District,
Sonoma County Regional Parks

Speaker Bio:

Beth Wyatt has worked in emergency services for over 16 years. As a Supervising Park Ranger for Sonoma County Regional Parks, Ms. Wyatt serves her community as a peace officer, emergency medical technician and disaster worker. In 2021, she graduated with her master's degree in Emergency Services Administration. She also has two children diagnosed with autism. This combination of professional and personal experience makes her uniquely qualified to speak on the challenges of working with patients on the autism spectrum during emergencies. She has successfully developed and delivered training to departments on recognizing, preventing and deescalating emergencies involving patients impacted by autism. She developed a handbook titled: Preparing Your Child for Disaster: A Guide for Parents and Caretakers of Autistic Dependents. Ms. Wyatt has presented to multiple agencies and organizations including, Los Angeles County Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD), Los Angeles Community Preparedness Taskforce, and police, fire and EMS agencies.

Presentation:

Autism and Disaster Preparedness: A Training for Emergency Services Providers

Disaster preparedness is key to an individual's resilience before, during, and after a disaster.

Autism impacts an individual's ability to adapt to changes. Advanced preparation increases the ability of people with autism to cope with the disruption of disasters. Unfortunately, there is a lack of disaster preparedness resources designed to address disaster preparedness in people with autism. Common traits of autism, including sensory sensitivity, executive functioning deficits, and communication difficulties impacts an individual's ability to plan for and function during disaster. People with autism will benefit from advanced preparation to adapt during novel

situations, such as a disaster. Preparation for people with autism may include addressing unique medical, sensory, and communication needs. The development of a disaster preparedness booklet for parents and caregivers of autistic dependents encourages disaster preparedness. When combined with training for disaster response organizations to recognize and respond to autism during emergencies and disasters, the handbook *Preparing Your Child for Disaster: A Guide for Parents and Caregivers of Autistic Dependents* will help prepare people with autism for disasters. Preparation is an important step for people with autism and can be the difference between successful surviving disaster or being faced with the effects of a sensory overload.